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THE FORCE OF HABIT:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE STUDENTS

OF THE

University of North Carolina,

AT CHAPEL HILL, MARCH 31ST, 1833.

BY WILLIAM HOOPER,

THEN PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT LANGUAGES IN THE UNIVERSITY.

Nemo repente turpissimus fuit.—Juv.

No man e'er reached the heights of vice at first—
By just degrees we mount from crime to crime,
And perfect villain is the work of time:
Never let man be bold enough to say:
"*Thus and no farther shall my passion stray;*"
The first crime past, compels us on to more,
And guilt proves fate, which was but choice before.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

SECOND EDITION.

RALEIGH:

A. M. GORMAN, PRINTER.—SPIRIT OF THE AGE OFFICE.

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PREFACE.

Young Gentlemen of the University:

I dedicate this Discourse to your service. At your request I have submitted it to the press. As a literary effort I am sensible it presents no claims to such partiality; but as containing important truths, worthy of being often held up before your minds and reflected upon again and again, I have thought it might not be entirely undeserving to pass into a form that should give it a chance of more durable utility than mere evanescent utterance can ever effect. God grant that the considerations here urged upon you, may frequently recur to you in the hour of need. I have labored many years in endeavoring to communicate classical learning to the youth of North Carolina; but all that I have done in that way affords me less comfort in the retrospect, than the possibility that something I may have said in the sacred desk, has had a share in forming a youthful heart to virtue, and leading it to seek acquaintance with God:—If in the course of my connexion with the young men of this State, I have met with any success of this kind, I must esteem it as my most precious earthly reward, and the most valuable fame I could inherit.

April, 1833.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

It is with gratitude to God and to the distinguished head of our University that I hear, that this Discourse has been read annually, for a number of years, to the Senior Class, in that important Institution; and that a second Edition has been now ordered. To be thus encouraged to cherish the hope that one's written words are wielding even a small secret control over the conduct of a large body of influential youth, and helping to fashion their moral characters for good rather than for evil, may well warrant an inward joy that falls not to the lot of those splendid but vicious minds whose baleful fires dazzle but to betray, and blast the roses of youthful genius which they have developed and expanded. Far from me and from my youthful readers be the accursed ambition of Phæton,

P1800!

which would burn up the world for the sake of one glorious day in the chariot of the sun. Rather let ours be the prayer of the poet:

"Oh give me *honest* fame, or give me none."

Since this address was delivered to the Students, the University, under wise and steady regulation and sound instruction, has so increased its numbers and its attractions, as to make the writer realize still more deeply the honor and the responsibility of being admitted to share in the moral influences that are brought to bear upon it. It must stir the pride of an old Alumnus to revisit Chapel Hill after an absence of many years. He will find that the Genius of improvement which has been bestriding the world with giant steps, has left a foot-print there; that the hand of time which has blanched his temples and wrinkled his cheeks has only brought out into fuller luxuriance the beauties of his Alma Mater; that her graveled walks, her grassy terraces, her architectural improvements, her ampler halls, her expanded libraries, her increased academical corps, and her cultivated society, make it a higher privilege now than it was in his days, to tread these classic shades, and perhaps, he will find a sigh escaping him that he was born thirty years too soon.

Raleigh, Nov. 6th, 1851.

A DISCOURSE, &c.

JER. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

I shall take occasion from these striking words of Scripture to address you, my hearers, on The force of Habit. You all know that a habit is formed by the repetition of any act, until, by frequency and long familiarity, it becomes easy and natural. Hence it has grown into a proverb that "habit is a second nature." Of how much moment then must it be, to mark with especial vigilance, and to guard with especial care, that season of life, when the habits begin to be formed, and the character is beginning to assume that shape which it will carry through the whole of our earthly sojourn, and which will affect our destiny for eternity! It is because most of my audience are at this critical period of their lives, that I think no subject on which I could possibly address them, is more appropriate to their condition; no one, which could more justly claim their deep and serious reflection. It is not merely to fulfil a customary round of duty; it is not merely to occupy you the usual time with the expected pulpit performance, and then to let you go away, our minds being well satisfied if the end be gained of having kept up for another Sabbath the decent observance of our religion, and of having thrown out some thoughts acceptable to your present hearing. No, my friends. We aim at something more than this barren discharge of a periodical duty, or this half-hour's occupation of your minds. It is with the cherished hope and the fervent prayer that something may be dropped at this time, which may occur to your meditations at many a future day, and have some operation in regulating those habits which are now fixing themselves upon you, that I have chosen the words of the text, as the subject of my present address. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" exclaims God by the mouth of the prophet to his people, now become obstinate and inveterate in their wickedness: "Can the

Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Here the doctrine is taught, that when habits of evil are formed, they cleave to us with as close and inseparable a tenacity as the complexion of our skin; and that you might as well expect the African, by an act of his will, to become white, or the leopard to change his spotty hide, as to expect those addicted to sinful courses to renounce them, and become good. The comparison is certainly a most striking and forcible one, and conveys little less than the absolute impossibility and hopelessness of a recovery from vicious habits. I will not go so far as to say, that by likening moral reformation to two natural impossibilities, the divine word means to pronounce moral reformation to be utterly impossible. But this I may safely say, that by the comparison, God evidently intends to teach us that a return from evil habits is extremely difficult and improbable, and would be almost as miraculous a departure from the usual laws of the moral world, as the voluntary assumption of a new skin by the Ethiopian or the leopard, would be from the laws of the physical world. So our Saviour declared the salvation of a rich man to be more difficult than the passage of a camel through a needle's eye—a natural impossibility; but at the same time brought the case within the reach of divine omnipotence and mercy, saying that "with men such a thing was impossible, but not with God." Most certain is it, then, that the Maker of our frame here calls upon us to mark and take notice of an important and most inflexible law of our moral constitution, to wit, that WHAT WE ARE MADE BY LONG HABIT, THAT WE SHALL CONTINUE TO BE THROUGH LIFE. I say further, that our observation of human nature abundantly confirms the doctrine, and proves that men are carried onward by old habits with a certainty and fatality almost as rigid as that which propels the rivers onward to the ocean. Let none complain of this law of our nature. Let none say, why was man made so much the creature and slave of habit, that when once entangled, he loses all power to extricate himself. We might as well quarrel with the law of gravitation which destroys the life of a man who flings himself from the top of a precipice. The same law of physical nature which makes the fall from a precipice fatal, and which brings down heavy bodies with destructive force upon thousands of human beings, that same law holds the earth in its orbit, binds all its millions of inhabitants to their homes upon its surface, makes the showers descend to gladden the fields, and rolls the waters

that would otherwise stagnate and poison us, with healthful currents to their mighty reservoir.

Nor is this *moral* law, whose stubborn strength is so much complained of, less a proof of the wisdom of the author of nature than the other, nor is it less remarkable for its salutary effects when legitimately used than for its pernicious effects when abused. It is by habit that all the most necessary acts of life are rendered easy and pleasant. By habit we learn to walk, to speak, to read and write, to perform all manual operations with facility and despatch. By the power of habit are all those acts carried on which minister to the wants and conveniences of life. By the power of habit is the printer enabled to combine his types into words, with a rapidity astonishing to the eye and surpassing all previous belief, and to prepare for us those thousands of volumes which are continually filling the world with intelligence and delight.

This same principle of our constitution, is no less subservient to the passive, than to the active powers of man. It enables us to endure with ease, hardships that were at first intolerable. It enables man to breathe with impunity the pestiferous atmosphere of crowded manufactories, to reside in every climate, and after spending half his life among northern snows, to go and spend the remainder in the torrid zone.

Now let us mark the influence of this powerful law of nature upon our moral conduct. We find from personal experience, and we know from observations on our fellow-men, that our natural appetites acquire strength from every indulgence; that at first it is comparatively easy to restrain them within lawful barriers; but that habits of excess render them imperious and uncontrollable, so that we are dragged on after them, as by an invisible chain, whose strength bids defiance to all our resistance. This is the case with respect to our natural appetites. And it holds equally in relation to our artificial appetites. A man may contract such an appetite for tobacco, opium, or ardent spirits, as to crave these naturally distasteful articles with a rage of desire, equal to natural hunger and thirst. It is mercifully provided, however, by the constitution of our nature, that habit may be made as powerful an auxiliary to virtue as to vice. By means of it not only sensual appetites and evil passions become dominant and irresistible, but the numerous train of virtues, to which our nature is less inclined, and the incipient practice of which requires so much heroic resolution and self-denial, all these feel the benign force of habit, and become in time, not only easier of performance, but as fixed and cer-

tain in their operation on our conduct,* as are any of our natural instincts. We are, then, creatures of habit. Whatever becomes habitual becomes easy, whether it be virtue or vice. Whenever we have formed a habit, we seem to act almost mechanically in obedience to the habit without an effort of the will. Indeed, so prone are we to repeat habitual actions, and so little reflection and virtuous resolution are we conscious of in obeying good habits, that it seems as if they were

*The reader will thank me for enriching my page with the following profound observations. "Experience," says Mr. Stewart, "diminishes the influence of passive impressions on the mind, but strengthens our active principles. A course of debauchery deadens the sense of pleasure, but increases the desire of gratification. An immoderate use of strong liquors destroys the sensibility of the palate, but strengthens the habit of intemperance. The enjoyments we derive from any favorite pursuit, gradually decay as we advance in years; and yet we continue to prosecute our favorite pursuits with increasing steadiness and vigor. On these two laws of nature, is founded our capacity of moral improvement. In proportion as we are accustomed to obey our sense of duty, the influence of the temptations to vice is diminished, while at the same time our habit of virtuous conduct is confirmed. It is thus that the character of the beneficent man is formed. The passive impressions which he felt originally and which counteracted his sense of duty, have lost their influence, and a habit of beneficence is become a part of his nature. We might naturally be led to suspect that the young and unpracticed would be more disposed to perform beneficent actions, than those who are advanced in life, and who have been familiar with scenes of misery. And, in truth, the fact would be so, were it not that the effect of custom on this passive impression is counteracted by its effects on others; and above all by its influence in strengthening the active habits of beneficence. An old and experienced physician is less affected by the sight of bodily pain than a younger practitioner; but he has acquired a more confirmed habit of assisting the sick and helpless, and would offer greater violence to his nature, if he should withhold from them any relief that he has in his power to bestow. In this case we see a beautiful provision made for our moral improvement, as the effects of experience on one part of our nature are made to counteract its effects on another."—*Philos. of the Mind, vol.* 1, *p.* 386.

These remarks of Stewart were suggested by the following passage in Butler's Analogy. "From these two observations together, that practical habits are formed and strengthened by repeated acts, and that passive impressions grow weaker by being repeated upon us, it must follow that active habits may be gradually forming and strengthening, by a course of acting upon such and such motives and excitements, whilst these motives and excitements themselves are, by proportionable degrees, growing less sensible, i. e. are continually less and less sensibly felt, even as the active habits strengthen. And experience confirms this: for active principles at the very time they are less lively in perception than they were, are found to be, somehow, wrought more thoroughly into the temper and character, and become more effectual in influencing our practice. Let a man set himself to attend to, inquire out, and relieve distressed persons, and he cannot but grow less and less sensibly affected with the various miseries of life, with which he must become acquainted; when yet, at the same time, benevolence, considered not as a passion, but as a practical principle of action, will strengthen, and whilst he passively compassionates the distressed less, he will acquire a greater aptitude actively to assist and befriend them," &c.

These remarks of both these profound and sagacious writers, I have been very willing to transfer to this place, at once to give a more durable value to this pamphlet than it would otherwise possess, and to tempt my young friends to dive for other pearls in the same deeps.

hardly entitled to a moral character; so nearly do they approach to being involuntary, like the play of our lungs and the beating of our heart. The time and sphere, then, for virtuous choice and virtuous determination, is in the outset of life. It consists in oft repeating those acts which lead to good and valuable habits, and in denying again and again, as often as they solicit us, those acts which lead to vicious habits. Here then my young friends take your stand. Resist the beginnings of evil; yes, the beginnings: that is the important juncture. Yield to the beginnings of evil, and you are undone.* Your ruin can be predicted with almost as much certainty, as that of the bark which is floating towards the cataract of Niagara. Are you now free, unfettered by the toils of vice? Give not up I beseech you, that glorious, that blessed freedom. Let not the persuasion of the miserable victims of vice involve you in their degradation. What! Would you let a slave persuade you for the sake of companionship, to share his chains and his stripes? Would you let a man, who was fool and madman enough to set fire to his own house, persuade you to set fire to yours also, that you might both be in the same condition? How would you feel towards the man, who should seize your hand, run with you to the verge of a precipice, and then throwing himself over endeavor to pull you along with him? Would you not wrench your hand from his detested grasp, and recoil from him with horror and indignation? Yet you can smile with complacency upon the companion, who, himself the slave of vice, would have you to forsake the paths of innocence, and join him in his wicked courses, merely that he may have countenance and society in vice! You can put yourself under the guidance and conduct of such a veteran in profligacy, if he will but take hold of your arm, say "come along," and laugh at your timorous scruples! Oh! there are no words adequate to express the abhorrence due to those, who, not satisfied with being ruined themselves, practice their accursed arts in seducing young and thoughtless minds from the paths of rectitude, and glory in the propagation of vice. If those who turn many to righteousness shall receive an extraordinary reward, surely

> ————There is some chosen curse,
> Some hidden thunder in the stores of heav'n,
> Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man—

that finds an alleviation to his own misery in undoing others, or can

* Principiis obsta; sero medicina paratur,
Cum mala per longas invaluere moras.—Ovid.

look around with a devilish joy at the desolation he has spread. Yet it is to be feared that this enormity is often committed within Collegiate walls, erected for the nursery and culture of all noble and generous sentiments. Yes; we are obliged to believe that here, even in this very place, are simple-hearted, unsuspecting, moral young men, year after year, gradually contaminated by those who are older than themselves, and who instead of being their guides to virtue, use the influence of superior age to decoy them into sin. Ye unfeeling seducers of youthful innocence! Is it not enough that you feel, yourselves, the miseries of remorse? Have you so much malignity within you, as to find a solace to your pains in making others as wretched as yourselves? Is it not sufficient to stab the peace and wreck the hopes of your own parents, must you also stab the peace and wreck the hopes of other parents? Ah, if you have any pity or generosity left in your souls, if you would not, like Satan, enter paradise, and blast, out of sheer envy, the purity and happiness you cannot partake, leave uncorrupted those who yet walk in their uprightness; who promise to be the joy of their friends, and the hope of their country. If you must have companions of your guilty pleasures, take those who are already corrupted. Let those who take hands, and rush together into the vortex, and find a mad delight in riding round and round in the inebriate whirl of waters, which are just yawning to engulf them, let these, I say, be all equally ruined, equally bereft of conscience, equally lost to hope, with scowling despair written on their foreheads. Surely it ought to melt with sorrow the heart of a young man, not lost to all sensations of humanity, to lead astray another younger than himself. Should we not suppose that honor and every kindly feeling of the soul would rise up in his bosom in behalf of yet untarnished virtue, and induce him to thrust back from his company, the young proselyte who was ready to yield himself up to his ruinous example? How much more worthy would it be of every generous emotion, for those who have contracted any unhappy propensity, when they see others beginning to go the same way, rather to put them back, and say: "as for ourselves we cannot help indulging in these things, but you who are yet safe, and not fatally bent towards these destructive courses, you we advise to keep yourselves far from them." This is no more than that common charity which we all show to each other, when we have unfortunately taken a disease. We tell how we contracted it, and caution others against the same imprudence.

There are various evil habits to which your circumstances expose

you, some of which I will mention, and leave it to your good sense and to your consciences to apply the same reasoning and expostulations against those which I may not mention, but which you know threaten to ensnare you. With respect to them all I beg you to carry along with you, ever fresh in your memory this admonition, that "habit is a second nature," and that you may as soon expect any animal to act in a manner contrary to its nature, the lion to eat straw like the ox, and the wolf and the lamb to lie down in amity together, as for those to learn to do good who have been long accustomed to evil. Beware then, how you fall into the habit of what is wrong, and beware of the first act, lest that be the foundation of a habit—lest that give the soul an impulse from which it never, never shall recover.—If you are enticed by your own desires or by the arts of others, RESIST, as you would resist an attack upon your life, fly from the temptation—fight against the insidious passion, trample it under your feet and grind it to powder. When you are sailing by the rocks of the Sirens, trust not your ears to the soul-subduing song; but like Ulysses and his crew, stop fast your ears and let yourself be bound to the mast until you have passed the danger. Or, to quote you a better example, like the young and virtuous Joseph, snatch yourself forcibly away and flee far from the tempter and the temptation. Listen to the affectionate counsel of Solomon, the wisest of men: "My son, attend to my words: incline thine ear unto my sayings: Enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men.—Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. Hear then, my son, and be wise. Be not among wine bibbers, among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty.—Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup; at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Oh how exactly true have miserable thousands found this to be, to their eternal cost!

I mentioned that there were some habits to which your circumstances render you peculiarly obnoxious, and against which therefore, every one among you ought to case himself in triple armour. Here I cannot do better than copy a passa ge from Dr. Paley's moral philosophy, a book which, along with some doctrines of dangerous tendency, coutains many valuable rules for the conduct of life. "Man," says this celebrated author, "is a bundle of habits. There are habits not only of drinking, swearing, and lying, and of some other things which are commonly acknowledged to be habits, but of every modifi-

cation of action, speech and thought. There are habits of attention, vigilance, advertency, of a prompt obedience to the judgment occurring, or of yielding to the first impulse of passion, of extending our views to the future, or of resting upon the present, of indolence and dilatoriness, of vanity, of fretfulness, suspicion, captiousness, ... of covetousness, of overreaching, intriguing, projecting. In a word, there is not a quality or function either of body or mind, which does not feel the influence of this great law of animated..... A rule of life of considerable importance is, that many things ought to be done and abstained from solely for the sake of habit. We will explain ourselves by an example: A man has been brought up from infancy with a dread of lying. An occasion presents itself, where at the expense of a little veracity, he may divert his company, set off his own wit with advantage, attract the notice and engage the partiality of all around him. This is not a small temptation. And when he looks at the other side of the question he sees no mischief that can ensue from this liberty, no slander of any man's reputation, no prejudice likely to arise to any man's interest. Were there nothing further to be considered, it would be difficult to show why a man under such circumstances might not indulge his humor. But when he reflects that his scruples about lying have hitherto preserved him free from this vice; that occasions like the present will return, where the inducement will be equally strong but the indulgence much less innocent, that his scruples will wear away by a few transgressions and leave him subject to one of the meanest and most pernicious of all bad habits—a habit of lying whenever it will serve his turn: when all this, I say, is considered, a wise man will forego the present, or a much greater pleasure, rather than lay the foundation of a character so vicious and contemptible."

I quote this passage, not with entire approbation, because I think, whenever we are tempted to a deviation from truth, even in trifles, that a regard for the sacredness of truth, an abhorrence for falsehood, a reverence for conscience and a fear of God, ought at once to rebuke away the plausible deceit independently of the consideration that it will lay the foundation for a bad habit. But the reflections suggested by Dr. Paley, may well come in as powerful auxiliaries, to back the instant and spontaneous refusal of an honest mind. They are reflections too, which might probably operate with consiclerable force on many who think very lightly of occasional falsehood in trifles.—Such persons should weigh well the danger of trifling with a tender

conscious—of diminishing that awful veneration for truth which we ought to cultivate—of gradually breaking down the barrier in our moral feelings between right and wrong, and at length of violating truth with as little scruple in the most important matters as at first we did in the smallest. Let these reflections, I beseech you, have the weight they ought to have in checking that levity with which an excuse is fabricated for neglect of duty. It is fashionable to think and speak of such fabrications as not at all criminal or dishonorable—as quite pardonable. "It is only baffling the Faculty by presenting an excuse which they cannot refuse—they cannot have the face to dispute our word, though we can have the face to make our word unworthy of their confidence—we are not bound to observe faith with the Faculty." What a shocking doctrine is this, that you should not be obliged to observe faith with any and with every one! Is this the casuistry of Colleges? I hope not. I hope that not many among us have adopted principles so loose. For depend upon it, my young friends, that the person who can consent to violate truth whenever it suits his convenience to make up an excuse from collegiate duty, cannot have a very delicate sense of moral obligation on the score of truth, and it will not be surprising if he soon lose credit for veracity with his companions. In all communities there will be some who will fall in with every vicious habit that happens to be fashionable, and will carry it just as far as they dare carry it, without forfeiting their character. They have no fixed principles, no firm integrity of purpose, no independent rule of action, no settled habit of doing what is right at once, without waiting to see if public opinion will not countenance an aberration. Such persons are mere moral chameleons;* they take their complexion from surrounding objects. Let them be at Rome, they will be like those at Rome; or if at Botany Bay, their plastic character can easily be moulded into an assimilation with the manners and morals of that famed colony of convicts. Let it be the fashion to swear, to drink, to seduce, to fight duels, to spend their money in gaming and have none to pay honest debts with, to *break*, and live in the same style after their bankruptcy as before, these obsequious apes of *the mode*, without a moment's hesitation give into follies and vices that chance to prevail and are glad when the laxity of public morals will prevent such practices from rendering

* As the chameleon which is known
To have no colours of his own;
But borrows from his neighbor's hue,
His white or black, his green or blue.—Prior.

them infamous. Now these persons are withheld from the worst actions only by the fear of disgrace. They are not ashamed to commit the acts themselves, but only ashamed of the detection of them. If a person has contracted such principles in a college, wonder not if in subsequent life you find him careless of veracity.*

I might enter upon the same course of reasoning with regard to many other bad habits, such as swearing, idleness, encroachment upon your neighbor's time, making a joke of taking any article of a fellow student's property, &c. These things are done thoughtlessly, but must injure the delicacy of moral principle; they must gradually impair virtuous sensibility; or, as Mr. Burke beautifully expresses it, "that chastity of honor which dreads a stain like a wound." Let me advise you, whenever wrong practices prevail in college, not slavishly to fall in with them, and say: "Why, nothing is more common among us; nothing is thought of such things." Rather oppose the weight of your influence and example against such practices, and if you should be singular, dare to be singular in a good cause;

> Rather stand up assured, with conscious pride
> Alone, than err with millions on your side.

But I pass over all other habits as of minor importance, that I may occupy the remainder of my time in speaking of one more dangerous and fatal than all the rest. You cannot be ignorant that I allude to the appetite for spirituous liquors. That the most powerful arguments and expostulations, against this propensity are much needed in every college is unhappily too well known. It is wonderful that when the whole country is covered with monuments of ruin produced by intemperance—of intellectual and moral worth once high in dignity, now abject and prostrate—of families once happy and prosperous, now helpless, broken-hearted and struggling for subsistence—it is wonderful that young men, seeing so many of these monitory spectacles before them, will venture to taste the liquid poison which

* During the last war, I happened to travel, in one of our public conveyances, with a young officer of the army. Having occasion to stop in one of the cities, I accompanied him into a shop where he enquired the price of a sword. He declined purchasing then, but told the shop-keeper he would "step in to-morrow and look at them again," when he knew that we were to depart in a few hours! I blushed for him, that a soldier, whose glory it is to scorn whatever is false and disingenuous, should value truth so little. Will you say, this was a trifle? Well, so was the temptation a trifle, and I am not sure that the same man, upon the occurrence of a great temptation with the hope of concealment, would not have lied in the most important matter. Yet if a person had offered to doubt this man's word on any occasion, he would have been ready to run him through the body.

has spread around them this desolation. Yet strange to tell, they will rush upon the peril without even the temptation of appetite.—Yes, many a youth, it is feared, has here* begun to drink when he had a positive dislike to the taste of spirits, merely for the sake of appearing sociable and manly. But soon he pays dearly for his temerity and vain-glory. Soon the insidious passion fastens itself upon him—he contracts a liking for stimulating drink, which perhaps shows its immediate effects in slackening his exertions in his class, creating an aversion to labor, a distaste for his studies, and a fondness for idle company. No wonder now at the oft alleged excuse of sickness, for absence from duty. For what else can be expected after such indulgences, but lassitude, and drowsiness, and nausea? No wonder if, presently, college restraints and requisitions become intolerable, and an application is made to his parent, requesting that he may be permitted to return home, in the midst of his collegiate course. Then may we predict his impending ruin with mournful certainty, and resign him up with despair to the despotism of a habit which overleaps all the barriers that parents and trustees and preceptors could throw in its way! May I not be speaking to some now, who are conscious that this habit has obtained an almost complete ascendancy over them? Do they not feel its despotism over the will? Do they not find themselves totally unable to resist the cravings of appetite, although they know the danger of the habit that is growing upon them? They know it, but alas! it is too late; the pleasure of present gratification is all they care for, and they purposely shut their eyes to the probable issue of these things. But others can see it, if they will not. Yes; we can calculate upon the premature ruin and early death of such a young man with almost as much confidence, as if the deep, hollow cough, the hectic flush and the wasted form marked him out as the victim of consumption: I say with almost as much certainty; because the very same experience that teaches us the laws of the natural world, teaches us the laws of the moral world. The very same observation that makes us know the cough, the hectic flush, the wasted form, the hemorrhage from the lungs to be alarming

*The writer would not be understood to intimate that the habits of the students whom he addressed were worse, or their temptations greater than those of members of colleges generally. He feels it as due to them to say on the contrary, that a Temperance Society embracing a considerable number of the students belongs to the college, and that he believes parents encounter no greater risk in venturing their sons at this than at any other similar institution. So far as he has had an opportunity of discovering, an appetite for drink is as little indulged in this college as in any other.

prognostics of dissolution, enables us also to know that the morning dram, the evening carousal, the secreted bottle, the tainted breath, the flushed or the pale face, the ill-gotten lesson, are alarming presages of a habit of incurable intemperance. And we anticipate the speedy and mournful issue of the one, with as little danger of mistake as the issue of the other.

Will then any one who is sensible of being in the very jeopardy I describe, say, "What must I do to be saved?" I reply: even symptoms of consumption have been removed by an early resort to the proper means. And it is with this very hope of your taking a timely alarm, and adopting the proper means of recovery that I ring these admonitions in your ears. I would depict with all my powers the terrible danger of an *incipient habit;* that those yet free may keep free; may come not nigh the slippery verge. And I would sound a still louder alarm of the awful issue of *confirmed* habit, to those who are just beginning to feel its force. I would say to them: feel and act as if you were sliding with smooth and pleasant motion down a mountain's icy breast, that overhung a yawning abyss. You are beginning to descend; but the declivity is yet gradual, the way is smooth, and your motion is not rapid enough to alarm you, but only sufficiently so to animate your spirits, and to excite a glorying of mind at the bravery of your enterprise. Your older and more experienced friends stand on the neighboring heights, and watch with considerable anxiety your thoughtless career. They cry out to you, and tell you of the precipice ahead. Be advised; let not their warning voice be neglected; throw yourself from the flying vehicle that is hurrying you to destruction; grasp at every twig that will arrest your progress, and strain every muscle and sinew to regain the summit from which you so heedlessly set out. But if you refuse; if you laugh at the idle fears of your friends; if you flatter yourself that you can stop long before you reach the precipice; all they can do is to look on with silent agony at the approaching catastrophe. They could tell you if you would hear them, that the declivity is every moment becoming steeper; that the velocity of a falling body is every moment accelerated; that the twigs along your path which once might have arrested you, will now snap in an instant before the violence of your motion, and onward, onward, onward you must go until you reach the verge, then take the awful leap and disappear forever! And if such a fate as I have described were to befall you, in the literal sense of the description, it would be less mournful than that it should befall you in the allegorical sense intended. For then you might die compara-

tively innocent and respectable. Your friends might not see your mangled corpse, nor feel disgraced by your death. But who can do justice to the feelings of those parents whose son, just ripening into manhood, is dying before their eyes, the loathsome victim of his guilty excesses! How shall they escape from the hideous spectacle? Their own house, the only place they have to lay their head, the birth place of their children, the spot where are clustered all their comforts, the peaceful sanctuary of their old age, becomes the hospital of their reprobate son, worn out with intemperance. He occupies one of the chambers. There, while they lie on their sleepless beds in a neighboring room, (I have witnessed something of what I describe) they hear his calls for drink, his disgusting belches, his horrid execrations against himself, and ever and anon a groan, bespeaking misery too big for words to tell! And is this the return you make, degraded young man, for all the loving-kindness of your parents? Is this the way you requite the father that dandled your infancy on his knee, and from that time till the present has been toiling to provide for your happiness! Is this your gratitude to the mother that brought you into the world, that cherished you at her breast, that tended your cradle with throbbing temples and an aching heart, that watched you all along your playful boyhood with ceaseless tenderness, and that at length let you go from under her eye to a place of education, only from the confidence (a confidence alas too much misplaced) that the principles and the gratitude with which she had imbued you, would forever forbid you to distress her by a vicious life? Surely this, if any thing in the world, realizes the fable of the frozen viper, that, as soon as it was thawed into life, struck its envenomed fangs into the bosom that warmed it.

But I would not stop at the exhibition of the temporal, the earthly consequences of this worst of habits. Could I do it, I would disturb the slumbers of the dead—I would evoke from their tombs the myriads that have gone down thither before their time, the victims of drunkenness. I would array their ghastly spectres in a long line before you, sire by the side of son, and brother at the right hand of brother. I would call upon them to tell you of the first steps that led to their undoing; how they first trifled with their enemy—how they in thoughtless boyhood mixed with idle company; made drunkenness a subject of jesting; took a glass among their jovial friends, merely to appear social and manly when the liquor was not pleasant to their taste—how the appetite grew with every indulgence until it was im-

possible to deny it—until they themselves became the very beastly spectacles of intemperance they had been accustomed to look upon with loathing and contempt; how they lingered upon earth, becoming more and more the sorrow and shame of their friends, and at last sunk unregretted to the grave. I would extort from them "the secrets of their prison house." I would make them appear before you surrounded with their atmosphere of tempestuous fire—open before you their tortured breasts and disclose within the never-dying worm gnawing on their hearts—tell you with their burning tongues the horrors of their doom, and peal in your trembling ears the declaration of the Almighty, that drunkards shall lie down in the "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone for ever and ever." I should hope that such a vision would make you shun for life, the sight, smell and taste of inebriating liquors. Oh! in the contemplation of the manifold and direful miseries that flow from this bane of the human race, one might be tempted to curse the memory of the man that first invented the art of distillation; of extracting *death* from God's good creatures, intended to be the nourishers of *life*. One might be tempted to wish that every distiller of spirits, and every vender of spirits, and every drinker of spirits, could have their midnight slumbers haunted by the apparitions of pale widows and orphans in their robes of mourning, and by the horrible skeletons of their poisoned husbands sons and brothers, until, their goaded consciences should drive them with unanimous movement, to seize every vessel containing the liquid poison and throw it into a funeral pile, to make one general pious burnt-offering to Heaven, while the art of manufacturing the accursed pest should forever be blotted from the memory of man. But why wish for terrifying visions of the dead to benefit the living? They will never be granted. Nor are we sure that they would prove the means of reformation. For what says Christ, that divine anatomist of the human heart? "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rose from the dead." Bowing with unquestioning credence to the divine decision, and feeling deeply the utter impotency of man to help himself when sunk in evil habits, let us rather urge the poor slave of sin to look with imploring eye to the Heavens, and let us join our supplications to his that the Almighty's arm may be stretched down to "lift him out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay," and to put into his mouth the song of deliverance.

Before I conclude, I must take notice of a doctrine held by many,

sometimes even urged from the pulpit, which seems to lie as an objection to the argument we have been endeavoring to enforce. It is said that God can as easily convert a hardened profligate as the most correct moralist; nay, that the former will much more probably be awakened from his security than the latter, because the very enormity of his sins serves as an alarm-bell to shake his sleepy conscience, or as the sting of scorpions to rack him with fierce pains of intolerable remorse; and hence we hear it sometimes incautiously asserted that the man of sober, respectable character is in more danger of final perdition than the abandoned, confirmed libertine. What is the direct tendency of such a belief? Why to establish the dangerous paradox, that the more a man sins the better for himself—it will quicken his conscience and arm it with mighty energy to drive him from his evil courses; and thus his chance of salvation will be increased the deeper and deeper he plunges into iniquity. What an awful license such a belief must give to vicious propensities, what an additional impulse it must lend to the already imperious rage of appetite may easily be conceived. And yet nothing is more certain, if we are to believe our text and the facts occurring to our daily observation, than that the more a man sins the harder he grows, that every new sin stupefies and indurates the conscience, renders a man's retreat more difficult and improbable, and his final ruin more fatally certain. We may illustrate the two cases thus. Heaping sin after sin upon the conscience, may be compared to heaping green wood upon a few coals. The more you throw on, the more you crush the coals, and the greater danger of putting out the fire altogether. If however, the feeble heat should not expire under this incumbent weight, but should by great good fortune once ignite the wood contiguous to it, then all the oppressive heap serves as so much aliment to feed the flame, and to increase the greatness and heat of the fire. So a profligate's conscience has the almost certain prospect of being seared in final obduracy. But if by one of those astonishing acts of God's special mercy which it pleases him sometimes to work for the display of his power and goodness, that profligate's conscience is awakened, it will be apt to operate more powerfully upon him—apt to produce more awful agonies of fear, more convulsive struggles to effect an escape, deeper humiliation, and if he obtains pardon, more ecstatic gratitude, that such an enormous transgressor has been spared and purified and blessed. He has had much forgiven, he will therefore

love much.* But let every man beware how he tries the dreadful experiment of sinning in order to furnish himself with materials for repentance. Enough of these the most blameless will find who study the holy law of God, and compare it with the evil that is in their hearts. That delicacy of conscience which is the fruit and the reward of a moral life, will by the aid of God's Spirit, enable you to have a quicker and livelier feeling of what is evil, and to find as copious a source of godly sorrow and humiliation in the secret sins of your heart, as the gross transgressor finds in the recollection of his scarlet and crimson sins. Never have I heard from the lips, never have I read in the secret diary of any penitent prodigal, such deep, heart-touching confessions of inward depravity and self-loathing, as appears in the journals of Edwards and Brainerd and Martyn and Payson, men who were preserved comparatively pure and free of vicious habits from their tender years. The profligate *may* escape; but he will have reason to remember all his life time, that he has escaped as by fire. Like one of Milton's infernal potentates, he bears on his marred visage the signals of his unrighteous battle with Heaven.

> ———His face
> Deep scars of thunder have intrenched.

—He will have cause to bemoan while he lives his career of profligacy. He will be "made to posess the iniquities of his youth" † in bodily diseases, a shattered constitution, shame for past dishonor, past injuries to others—injuries alas! irreparable; injuries to those who are dead, and therefore out of the reach of his tardy retribution —injuries to those who are living, but irremediably blasted in fortune and reputation, or unconquerably fortified in vice and infidelity.‡ He will find himself reaping the bitter fruits of early crimes, perhaps in the rebellion or lewd lives of his children, vitiated by his bad example and his cruel neglect—in a soiled and polluted imagination, and the

* For edifying examples of such wonderful transformations of character by the power of religion, I would refer the young man to the lives of Lord Rochester, Col. Gardiner, Capt. Wilson, Wm. Howard and Jno. Newton.

† Job xiii, 26.

‡ Mr. Newton, in the narrative of his early life, which has all the fascination of a novel, makes the mournful confession, that, after his conversion he tried to reclaim those whose faith he had overthrown—but in vain.—They laughed him to scorn! So much easier did he find it to poison than to cure—to demolish than rebuild. The extinction of the spark of virtue is like the extinction of the precious spark of life:

> "* * * once put out—
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume."

pestilent and contaminating recollection of past abominations. These may make him go mourning all his days. To cleanse this heart, this Augean stable where foul lusts have held their abode for many years, will furnish him with Herculean labor to the end of his life. Oh! what untimely, unwelcome intrusions will the visions of former riot make upon his soul, perhaps in his most hallowed moments, perhaps in the very attitude of devotion! How much work will he have to do in keeping out these vile thoughts? How will they with impudent freedom rush unbidden into the breast that once harbored, but would now fain exclude them, and with their harpy touch defile the sanctuary of the soul, and the very offering that is there burning on the altar of God!

> Diripiuntque dapes, contactuque omnia fœdant
> Immundo.

Oh then will the reclaimed profligate bemoan himself that he ever laid up within him such materials for shame and sorrow, and will envy those whose youth unstained by vice, has never entailed upon them such an inheritance of guilty recollections. You may say that these things serve to humble him. Yes they do, but they often keep him mourning and prostrate, ashamed to lift up his head or exert his hands, when he ought to be up and doing, rejoicing and praising, and acting for his God.

But supposing the hardened sinner's conscience to awake, is he sure that it will awake to repentance? Is he sure that it will not awake to horror and desperation? Is he sure that it will not, like Cain's, drive him out from the presence of God? That he will not quickly draw down again over his eyes, the vail which had been for a moment drawn up, but disclosed prospects too horrible for contemplation? Is he sure that an insulted, aggrieved and outraged conscience will not like the ill-boding owl, scream in his ears the shrill note of despair, of sin beyond the reach of God's mercy, sin inexpiable even by the blood of Christ, until it urges him like Judas over the precipice of self-murder!